

REGION 4**INTRA-SERVICE SECTION 7 BIOLOGICAL EVALUATION FORM****Originating Person:** Jennifer Hinckley**Telephone Number:** 850.925.0544**E-Mail:** Jennifer_Hinckley@fws.gov**Date:** January 8, 2007**PROJECT NAME :**

St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge Prescribed Fire Plans for Fiscal Year 2007

I. Service Program:☐ Ecological Services☐ Federal Aid☐ Clean Vessel Act☐ Coastal Wetlands☐ Endangered Species Section 6☐ Partners for Fish and Wildlife☐ Sport Fish Restoration☐ Wildlife Restoration☐ Fisheries☒ Refuges/Wildlife**II. State/Agency:** U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service**III. Station Name:** St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge**IV. Description of Proposed Action (attach additional pages as needed):**

This proposal of action is for the Fiscal Year 2007 Prescribed Fire Plans for St. Vincent National Wildlife Refuge.

The preferred prescribed fire compartments are C-3, C-6, C-9, C-11, C-14, and C-15. The total acreage is 5,365. C-15 Targeted for growing season 2,831 acres. 2

52% targeted for growing season burning.

V. Pertinent Species and Habitat:**A. Include species/habitat occurrence map:**

Maps are included in the prescribed fire plans for each unit with bald eagle nests.

B. Complete the following table:

SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT	STATUS ¹
Southern Bald Eagle	T
Indigo Snake	T
American Alligator	T S/A
Green Sea Turtle	E
Loggerhead Sea Turtle	T
Leatherback Sea Turtle	E
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle	E
Piping Plover	T
Wood Stork	E
Red Wolf	E

¹STATUS: E=endangered, T=threatened, PE=proposed endangered, PT=proposed threatened, CH=critical habitat, PCH=proposed critical habitat, C=candidate species

VI. Location (attach map):

- A. **Ecoregion Number and Name:** Northeast Gulf Watersheds
- B. **County and State:** Franklin County, Florida
- C. **Section, township, and range (or latitude and longitude):**
Township 9 South, Range 10 West, Sections 13, 14, 25
Township 9 South, Range 9 West, Sections
1,2,3,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36
Township 9 South, Range 8 West, Section 19,30,31
- D. **Distance (miles) and direction to nearest town:** 14 miles SW of Apalachicola
- E. **Species/habitat occurrence:** See maps located in the Prescribed Fire Plans for the bald eagle nests

VII. Determination of Effects:

- A. Explanation of effects of the action on species and critical habitats in item V.
B (attach additional pages as needed):**

SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT	IMPACTS TO SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT
Southern Bald Eagle	The prescribed fire operation will improve the understory conditions near the eagle nests and reduce the chances of a loss of eggs or chick during a wildfire. There may be potential adverse impacts to bald eagle nest trees. These potential adverse impacts are more than offset by the improvement to the habitat that results by these actions.
Indigo Snake	The prescribed fire operation will improve the understory conditions and habitat for the indigo snake. These potential adverse impacts are more than offset by the improvement to the habitat that results by these actions.
American Alligator	No Impact since they are a wetland species.
Green Sea Turtle	No Impact since they are a beach species.
Loggerhead Sea Turtle	No Impact since they are a beach species.
Leatherback Sea Turtle	No Impact since they are a beach species.
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle	No Impact since they are a beach species.
Piping Plover	No Impact since they are a beach species.
Wood Stork	This wetland species will not be directly impacted by fire. The burning of the marshes will open up feeding areas for the storks.

SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT	IMPACTS TO SPECIES/CRITICAL HABITAT
Red Wolf	The prescribed fire operation will improve the understory conditions. These potential adverse impacts are more than offset by the improvement to the habitat that results by these actions.

B. Explanation of actions to be implemented to reduce adverse effects:

SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT	ACTIONS TO MITIGATE/MINIMIZE IMPACTS
Southern Bald Eagle	All precautions will be made so that fire is prevented from damaging nest trees. The fuels will be reduced around the nesting trees prior to the ignition of the prescribed fire. Burning within 660 feet of a nest tree will not occur during the bald eagles nesting season (Oct 1-May 15) unless site specific monitoring conducted prior to burning indicates that the pair of eagles have not initiated nesting, or chronological nesting data for several years for a particular nest, documents departure from those dates. Smoke management will also be considered during the nesting season to minimize, as much as possible, any potential adverse impacts of smoke around the bald eagle nests.
Red Wolf	Red Wolves are mobile. They evolved in habitats where fire occurs. Their habitat will be improved by using prescribed fire. The locations of the wolves will be checked soon after the prescribed fire has occurred.
Indigo Snake	Indigo Snakes are mobile. They evolved in habitats where fire occurs. Their habitat will be improved by using prescribed fire.
American Alligator	No adverse effects.

SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT	ACTIONS TO MITIGATE/MINIMIZE IMPACTS
Wood Stork	No adverse effects.
Piping Plover	No adverse effects.
Green Sea Turtle	No adverse effects.
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle	No adverse effects.
Leatherback Sea Turtle	No adverse effects.
Loggerhead Sea Turtle	No adverse effects.

VIII. Effect Determination and Response Requested:

SPECIES/ CRITICAL HABITAT	DETERMINATION			RESPONSE REQUESTED
	NE	NA	AA	
Southern Bald Eagle		X		Concurrence
Indigo Snake		X		Concurrence
Red Wolf		X		Concurrence
American Alligator		X		Concurrence
Wood Stork		X		Concurrence
Green Sea Turtle	X			Concurrence
Loggerhead Sea Turtle	X			Concurrence
Leatherback Sea Turtle	X			Concurrence
Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle	X			Concurrence
Piping Plover	X			Concurrence

DETERMINATION/RESPONSE REQUESTED:

NE = no effect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action will not directly, indirectly, or cumulatively impact, either positively or negatively, any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat. Response Requested is optional but a "Concurrence" is recommended for a complete Administrative Record.

NA = not likely to adversely affect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action is not likely to adversely impact any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat or there may be beneficial effects to these resources. Response Requested is a "Concurrence".

AA = likely to adversely affect. This determination is appropriate when the proposed action is likely to adversely impact any listed, proposed, candidate species or designated/proposed critical habitat. Response Requested for listed species is "Formal Consultation". Response Requested for proposed or candidate species is "Conference".

James Burnett
Signature (originating station)

1/8/2006
Date

Project Leader
Title

IX. Reviewing Ecological Services Office Evaluation:

A. Concurrence X Nonconcurrence _____

B. Formal consultation required _____

C. Conference required _____

D. Informal conference required _____

E. Remarks (attach additional pages as needed): FWS# 4-P-07-078

Jan A. Meyer 1-23-07
Signature Date

Deputy Field Supervisor Panama City ES
Title Office

Stan Simpkins/R4/FWS/DOI

01/23/2007 12:21 PM

To Jennifer Hinckley/R4/FWS/DOI@FWS

cc Hildreth Cooper/R4/FWS/DOI@FWS, Thom
Lewis/R4/FWS/DOI@FWS

bcc

Subject St. Vincent NWR

Hi Jennifer, we have finished our review of the St Vincent NWR FY07 Fire Plan and concur with your "not likely to adversely affect" determination. You should receive the signed Intra Service Section 7 form by the end of this week.

I would like to provide a few additional comments on the FY 07 Burn Plans;

I note that of the 6 compartments targeted for burning this year, one (C-15) is specifically targeted for a growing season burn. C-15, 2,834 acres would represent 52% of your burning target for FY07. Burning half of your target acres during the growing season is a commendable goal and we wish to recognize St. Vincent for your efforts in working toward getting the refuge on a more ecosystem based growing season burning regime.

B.T. Mudder (August 2006) in his thesis Effects of Fire Season on Vegetation in Longleaf Pine (Pinus Palustris) Forests, states: "*Currently landowners and managers in the southeastern U.S. find it challenging, for a variety of reasons to burn during the growing season. Consequently when managing longleaf pine forests focus should be on applying low intensity surface fires every 1-4 years regardless of season. A few growing season burns over a short time period, when applied to stands subjected to regular dormant season burns can provide significant benefits*". Other literature, just for example; Provencher et al (2003) and Brockway et al (1997) suggests that frequency of burn (return intervals) may be just as important as season of burn. (I'm very aware that St. Vincent stands are dominated by Slash pine, but for ecosystem restoration and management purposes on St. Vincent NWR, I believe the concepts addressed apply).

From review of the burning plans it appears that at least portions of compartments C-3, C-6, C-9, C-1 and C-14 have been recently burned(?). Therefore, we will continue to recommend that consideration be given to introducing growing season burning into these compartments as conditions permit. I also wish to point out that after growing season burning of the mainland compartment C-14, there may be some potential of finding the listed plant telephus spurge (as well as other rare and listed plants) in the burned pineland habitat. As noted above regardless of season of burn, a frequent return interval is important.

I hope you find these comments helpful. Once again kudos to yourself and staff for implementing this proactive burning program on St. Vincent. .

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